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ENG 2005-001: Beginning Playwriting

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English 2005: Beginning Playwriting

Instructor: Dr. David Radavich
Office: 3785 Coleman Hall
Telephone: 581-6971 (Office) or 345-9280 (Home)
Office Hours: 12:00-13:00 MWF; 14:00-15:00 W

Required Texts:

Catron, *The Elements of Playwriting*
Cerf, *Thirty One-Act Plays*
McNamara, *Plays from the Contemporary American Theatre*
Thomas, *Best American Screenplays*

PURPOSE. This course will introduce you to the basic building blocks of drama (e.g., plot, character, setting, climax). We will attempt to develop a sense of performance and audience awareness, increasing your understanding of the relationship between the written word and the demands of live performance. To this end, you will be expected to complete one performance-worthy script of one act or equivalent during the semester. Along the way, we will examine various genres and major playwriting philosophies, to aid you in developing your own individual approach. You may focus on writing for the stage, TV, screen, or radio, but the emphasis will fall on creating dramatic conflict for performance.

COURSE ORGANIZATION. The course will be divided roughly in half. During the first half, we will be reading and analyzing plays and writing scenes to help you develop your skills before launching into the main script. The second half will focus on revising and perfecting your script through class readings, improvisations, and, performances.

ASSIGNMENTS. The major assignments in this class will require writing a number of individual *scenes* in the appropriate format, to develop your skills in constructing plot, action, and dialogue within a convincing and engaging dramatic setting. A *midterm exam* will cover readings and discussion. During the second half of the course, you will be expected to assume performance rôles in scripts by others in the class. The *rough draft* of your script will bring together related scenes into a coherent whole. There will be no final exam; instead, your revised script, along with a 3-4-page writing commentary, will serve as a *portfolio*.

In-class responses will be assigned over the playtexts we read. In addition, *two reviews* of live, non-musical dramatic performances (ca. 2-3 pages double-spaced) will be required. Play performances may be attended at any location, and reviews may be turned in at any time during the semester.

GRADING. Evaluation of your work in this course will be demanding and fair and will include an assessment of your class preparedness and participation. Grading will be divided into thirds. ONE THIRD of your grade will be determined by your participation in class discussion and performance, as well as by your progress and improvement; in-class responses and reviews will be counted in this portion. The SECOND THIRD of your grade will be made up of your script assignments during term. The midterm exam will be worth **two** playwriting assignments, and the rough draft of your script will be worth **three**. The FINAL THIRD of your grade will consist of the revised version of your script and written commentary at semester's end.

LATE WORK. Assignments turned in late will be penalized one-third grade PER CALENDAR DAY late. Missed in-class assignments cannot be made up; that is the reward for coming to class regularly.

ATTENDANCE POLICY. You are assumed to be professionals-in-training and are expected to attend class regularly as you would show up for work on the job. The attendance policy for the course will operate as follows: you may miss up to one week of class without penalty; this allows you flexibility in case of illness or unexpected emergency. Thereafter, the course grade will be lowered proportionately for each week missed. If you are absent more than four weeks of class, you will automatically receive an F in the course.

PLAGIARISM. According to University policy,

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism - "The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*) - has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

CONFERENCES. Please feel free to consult me regarding ideas, planning, problems, revision, etc. I would be happy to meet with you at any mutually convenient time.

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

English 2005 Assignments

Jan. 12 - Introduction
14 - Catron, ch. 6
16 - France, *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*

Jan. 19 - King's Birthday; No Class
21 - Saroyan, *Hello Out There*
23 - **Character Sketch Due**

Jan. 26 - Catron, ch. 5
28 - Guare, *Marco Polo Sings a Solo*
30 - **Scene #1 Due**

Feb. 2 - Discussion
4 - Catron, ch. 2
6 - **Scene #2 Due**

Feb. 9 - Elements of screenwriting
11 - Screenplay (to be selected; in Thomas)
13 - Lincoln's Birthday; No Class

Feb. 16 - Comparison of media
18 - Catron, chs. 3-4; strategic planning
20 - **SCENARIO DUE**

Feb. 23 - Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*
25 - Catron, ch. 7
27 - **Excerpt #1 Due**

Mar. 1 - Discussion
3 - Shaw, *Bury the Dead*
5 - **MIDTERM EXAM**

Mar. 8 - Developing complications
10 - Catron, ch. 8
12 - **Excerpt #2 Due**

Mar. 15-19 - Spring Break

Mar. 22 - Building to the climax

24 - Trouble-shooting
26 - Discussion

Mar. 29 - Sound and spectacle
31 - Trouble-shooting
2 - **SCRIPT DUE**

April 5 - Performances
7 - "
9 - "

April 12 - Performances
14 - "
16 - "

April 19 - Performances
21 - "
23 - "

April 26 - Performances
28 - Fine-Tuning
30 - Review

NO FINAL EXAM; FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE